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ABSTRACT

Using games in the classroom is discussed as a means of promoting the learning of second language structure, fluency, and culture, and complementing concept development and learning. Attention is directed to the development or adaptation of games to the English as a second language curriculum and the development of games to meet specific needs. It is suggested that when students are involved in games, natural use of language occurs. In the application of games to the second language classroom, it is possible to use a game in such a way that the target language skill is incidental to the play and winning of the game, but language skills would be learned and practiced at the same time. Games that are tied to specific cultures are also noted, and adaptations of Lotto, and Bingo for classroom use are addressed. It is recommended that students make their own game boards and cards in order to practice lettering, writing, and reading, and that multiple sets of any game be made so that small groups of students can play the game at one time. The board game format can be adapted to other skills areas such as listening comprehension and repetition of sounds or sentences. It is concluded that games are a good alternative to language drills which are often confusing, practiced with no real context of meaning, and dull. (SW)

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THE USE OF GAMES IN TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM:

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A WORKSHOP

In an article entitled "Should We Teach Children Syntax?"¹, Dulay and Burt state that instead of directly teaching syntax to children in the class room, the language teacher should "...continue to diagnose children's second language speech..." and "...create speech environments in the classroom that capitalize on the child's natural language learning processes."

Dulay and Burt's conclusions support the idea that the learning of syntax in children is a natural process and that the role of the language teacher is one of documenting and monitoring language proficiency and changes in language proficiency as well as facilitating natural language acquisition by creating and promoting situations in which the second language is likely to be acquired. In simpler terms, the language teacher is first an evaluator of language proficiency and, second, a facilitator of situations in which language will be acquired naturally.

This suggests that it would be inappropriate to use such activities as pattern drills in attempts to teach syntax to children. In general, children lack the ability to consciously focus on and comment on their language use and young children lack the first language reading skills which can be brought to bear in learning a second language. In short, children make good acquirers of language but not good learners of language. Therefore, again, the teacher of a second language to children should work to promote language acquisition as opposed to attempting to overtly teach language structures.

The challenge for the second language teacher, then, is to develop a repertoire of activities which can be readily implemented and which promote language use. Games offer a set of highly motivating formats for this kind of language teaching activity.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how games can be used in the classroom to promote the learning of second language structure, vocabulary, fluency, and culture, and to complement concept development and learning. This workshop will include a description of how games can be developed or adapted to suit the ESL curriculum, the presentation of several specific games and their applications, and participant development of games to meet specific needs.

Second language teachers employ games because the activities suggested in commercial materials are often dull and the language production of students involved in these activities is often less than satisfactory in terms of fluidity, spontaneity and naturalness of speech. When students are involved in games, however, natural use of language is evident, even when the object of the game is not seemingly related to language use at all.

¹ Language Learning, 23(2):245-258 (December, 1973).

From John R. Boyd and John F. Haskell, eds., "Selected Papers from the Tenth Illinois TESOL/BE Annual Convention (Chicago, IL, February 26-27, 1982)

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A game is a competitive activity played for entertainment according to a set of rules. The rules of a particular game determine how the game is played, how turns are taken, and how one wins or loses the game. The rules also determine the roles of skill and chance in effecting the outcome of the game. For example, a traditional Spelling Bee is not really a game--it is an exhibition of spelling skill. Although there is some element of chance involved in this activity, chance will determine the specific word presented to a contestant and guessing may result in success at times, in general the good speller wins and the poor speller loses in the Spelling Bee.

In the application of games to the second language classroom, it is possible to use a game in such a way that the target language skill is incidental to the play and winning of the game. Here winning the game would not depend on proficiency in a particular language skill. Instead, language skills would be learned and practiced as a spin-off of the skill-chance interaction of the game. An illustration of this follows.

Games have their own languages. At the word level, players of bridge use the terms bid, pass, double, slam, and dummy; poker players have the terms ante, draw, raise, and fold in their jargon. In a similar way, students of ESL could be encouraged to use the verbs have and need in the context of a BINGO or lotto game. A natural dialog, like the following, might develop:

Jung: How many do you have?

Laura: I have four!

Jung: How many do you need?

Laura: Let's see...I need three to win this way.
I need three to win this way. And I need
four to win this way. I need ten to fill
the card.

Once students are accustomed to asking and responding using forms of have and need they will continue to do so even when the lotto game is adapted for practice with vocabulary, reading or other skills.

Traditional games, like languages, are tied to the cultures in which they are played. Games called King Fish and Double-Dutch are played by Afro-American children. These two are ball and jump-rope games respectively. Blind Man's Buff/Bluff was taught to the American settlers by the Native American people. Some games are common to different cultures. Name the following game:

Players sit around a table and spin a multi-sided top.
Depending on how the top lands, players put into a kitty
or draw from it.

The game is played for small coins or goodies.

The person familiar with Jewish culture will recognize the preceding game as dreidel--a game played by children at Chanukah using a four-sided top bearing Hebrew letters; in Hispanic culture a similar game, known as pirinola is played at any time of the year with a six-sided top. The use of games like these in the multi-cultural classroom can be used to build an appreciation for other cultures. In addition, students involved in

playing dreidel or pirinola have the opportunity to practice the language skills involved in asking for various coins (in making change to play the game) and the related concept skills of coin appearance and value, math skills, and others.

Games can be used as they are commonly played or adapted by the teacher in the second language classroom. For example, SCRABBLE can be adapted by having small teams work to form words on each turn. If each 2-4 person team is composed of speakers of various first language backgrounds then English practice will occur when it is used as the lingua franca within each team. If students are familiar with, and enthusiastic about, baseball--as many junior and senior high school students are--then a classroom game based on this sport can be devised as follows:

Students are divided into two teams.

A baseball diamond and scoreboard are drawn on the board.

Students, in turn, are asked a question by the teacher where questions are drawn from a pile of randomly ordered ones.

Students may elect to try for a single, double, triple, etc.

according to their individual ability, daringness, and situation.

A missed question results in an out; three outs retire the side.

Possible examples of various plays follows:

A SINGLE = give a first language equivalent of a target language word

A DOUBLE = give a target language equivalent of a first language word

A TRIPLE = give a synonym of a target language word

HOME RUN = translate a sentence into the target language

Although the game as described above applies to a two-language situation where the teacher knows the first language of the students, it can be adapted with a little creativity to the heterogeneous language background ESL situation.

Lotto, or Bingo, type games can be applied in various ways in the language class. Two formats for a lotto game follow. First, small lotto sets involving cards with six or more sections can be devised so that the game is played in a fill-the-card or cover-the-card way. In this case, each card would be entirely different from the others and chips that are drawn are used to cover the spaces or sections on the cards. (See Lotto Game 1)

A second lotto game, like traditional bingo, involves the use of cards with the same set of symbols arranged in different orders. Such cards could be used for alphabet identification, initial word sound identification, etc. Winners here could be determined by row, column, diagonal or other combinations. In this format, more than one winner could occur at one time. (See Lotto Game 2)

The application of lotto games is endless, with possibilities for teaching and practicing reading, vocabulary, and listening comprehension skills, as well as the number comprehension skills involved in traditional Bingo.

Like lotto games, card games can be adapted to teach a variety of skills. Go, fish! and Old Maid (pardon the chauvinism) formats lend themselves to a variety of vocabulary matching possibilities. Cards could be inscribed with drawings of objects and their names, synonyms, antonyms, first language words and second language equivalents, etcetera. Parts of sentences could be written on cards so that four pieces would be matched for a Go, fish! format lay-down and two cards for the other game.

Here two suggestions for the use of games will be made. First, it is best to let students themselves make up game boards, cards, etcetera. This will save the teacher time, involve the students in classroom management, and--most importantly--involve the students in the lettering and writing and reading skills to be practiced in playing the game. Second, multiple sets of any one game should be made. In this way, several small groups of students will be able to play the game at one time while the teacher circulates and moderates the various game tables. This maximizes student involvement and practice in playing the game and removes the focus of attention from the teacher to the skills and the game at hand.

Games based on television game shows are popular among students who already know and recognize the game. A Concentration game board can be developed with practice in translations, synonyms, or just reading and remembering new vocabulary words the object of the game. Games like these serve as quick and effective reviews before quizzes or tests or good filler activities for the end of a lesson.

Traditional word games such as Hangman and Categories (Guggenheim) serve well for spelling and vocabulary practice. In playing hangman, students can be advised to choose only words from a particular category of words, such as food names, names of vehicles, names of states, etcetera. Traditional language games such as I took a trip, Gossip (Telephone), and Twenty Questions can similarly be employed--either as typically played or adapted to meet special needs--in the language class.

Teacher-made games may take various forms, in addition to the adapted card games mentioned above. One format is the board game. In this game steps taken on one's turn are determined by a picked card or a spinner. In the Preposition game students must obey a command using the preposition they land on in order to advance. If a student lands on "above", for example, the teacher might say, "Put your hands above your head." As students become proficient at this receptive preposition use task they may take on the responsibility of reading the prepositions and forming their own novel commands aloud--thus growing into other areas of competence. (See Teacher-made game) The board game format can be adapted to other skill areas such as listening comprehension, repetition of sounds or sentences, etcetera. A game board with letters instead of prepositions on it could be made. In this case, each space on the board would have one letter, a consonant blend or a consonant diagraph written on it. Once a student landed on a space, he or she would have to draw from a pile with the same symbol on it. A card from the pile might contain a single word or a tongue-twister which the student would have to read or repeat. Essentially, however, the game board format would remain the same and students will adapt readily to revisions in content on the same game board form.

Teachers who use games in the classroom find them to be marvelously effective as teaching, practice, and review tools. Games can be used without compromising the seriousness of purpose of learning language skills. They offer a welcome alternative to language drills which are often confusing, practiced with no real context of meaning, and dull. Teachers who do not fancy themselves as especially creative can slowly immerse themselves in the world of games. One way is by adapting a childhood game to the classroom lesson. If the lesson plan calls for learning the parts of the body, Simon Says jumps into mind. In fact, it probably takes no more time to dream up a quick game than it does to compose an exercise sheet, type it and run it off. Not all games will go well at first; like new drills or other exercises they will take time getting used to and adaptations where pitfalls occur. Once games are introduced into the classroom students often remember games they played in other classes. Finally, the public library contains books with a variety of group, card, and word games which can be quickly adapted to meet the needs of students of a variety of needs and interests and to meet the requirements of the language lesson plan and curriculum.

LOTTO

GAME

1

(fill-the-card)

ball

cup

shoe

book

fish

star

bus

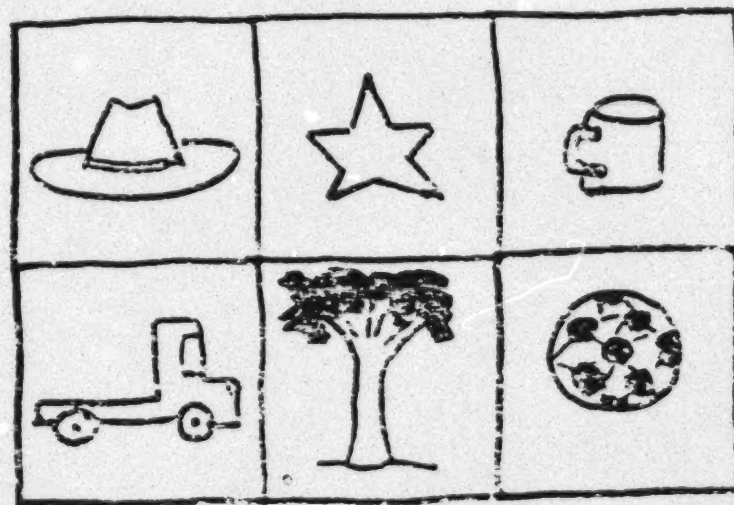
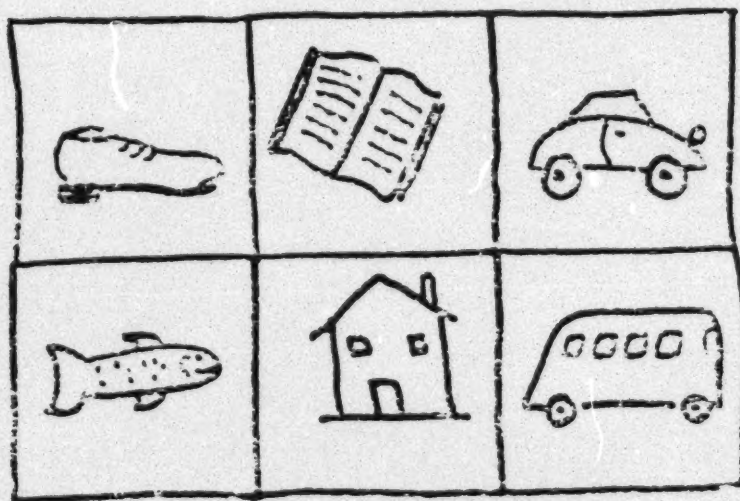
hat

tree

car

house

truck



LOTTO GAME 2 (row, column, diagonal, four corners wins)

SOME APPLICATIONS:

Alphabet identification

Initial word sounds, e.g. top, ran, foot

Final word sounds

t	p	r
f	n	c
s	b	m

p	b	t
c	f	s
r	m	n

r	s	c
f	b	t
m	p	n

Teacher-made game

